

Childers Announces \$7.1 Million Recovery Act Investment in Broadband Project to Bring Jobs, Economic Opportunity to North Mississippi

August 18, 2010

Washington, DC – Today, U.S. Rep. Travis Childers (MS-01) and U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced a new Recovery Act broadband infrastructure project that will improve access to broadband service and create jobs in North Mississippi. The Recovery Act Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP) has provided a \$7.1 million grant for Smithville Telephone Company, Inc. to design, engineer, and construct a broadband network. The project will improve existing broadband service, provide new service to currently unserved households, and create or retain 30 jobs. Childers and Vilsack announced the project on a conference call earlier today.

“Basic broadband service is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity,” said Childers. “Ensuring broadband access in rural areas is critical to strengthening our communities and fueling economic development. But our nation’s rural communities are often overlooked when it comes to expanding and updating infrastructure, including access to broadband.

“As a Member representing a highly rural district, and as co-chair of the bipartisan Congressional Rural Caucus, I’m proud to make rural communities’ access to broadband service a top priority. Today’s announcement is an important step toward making sure that all Americans, regardless of where they live, have access to broadband and the economic, educational, and social benefits that it provides. I will continue working hard to make sure that rural areas in North Mississippi have the resources they need to strengthen local communities and improve our economy.”

Smithville Telephone Company, a current provider of voice and broadband services in rural northeastern Mississippi, proposes to implement a fiber to the premises network overbuild to extend modern broadband services to 298 currently unserved households. Existing broadband service will also be improved so that a minimum of 20 Mbps service will be available to all of the company's broadband subscribers, with a technical capability for those in the proposed funded service area to access 100 Mbps service in the future. The overall project will pass 718 households and 15 businesses.

Today's announcement is part of the second round of USDA broadband funding through the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*

. Broadband initiatives funded under the Recovery Act are intended to accelerate broadband deployment in unserved, underserved, and rural areas and to strategic institutions that are likely to create jobs or provide significant public benefits. These initiatives include the development of a National Broadband Plan, the new Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), and the Rural Utilities Service Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP).

Rep. Childers has been a leader in working to increase broadband access in rural communities. Under the Recovery Act, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was required to submit a national broadband plan to Congress in February. The bipartisan Congressional Rural Caucus, which Childers co-chairs, held a roundtable discussion in December with FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski to talk about the development of a National Broadband Plan and how its implementation can best benefit rural communities. The Rural Caucus had previously sent a letter to the FCC urging the agency to address the needs of rural America as it began to develop a National Broadband Plan.

And, in April of this year, the Rural Caucus achieved an important victory in improving rural communities' access to broadband services. In response to concerns expressed by the Rural Caucus regarding the selection process for recipients of broadband stimulus funding, the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) agreed to extend the process's timeframe from 15 days to 25 days.

A pro-gun, pro-life Mississippian, Congressman Travis Childers (MS-01) represents the First Congressional District in North Mississippi. He is a member of the fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition and serves on the House Agriculture and Financial Services Committee. Congressman Childers co-chairs the reestablished bipartisan Congressional Rural Caucus and was appointed to the bipartisan Second Amendment Task Force. For more information, visit www.childers.house.gov

